

GROWTH GROUPS WEEK 2

WEEK OF JANUARY 22ND

EXPRESSING HOPE

THE SPIRIT OF
THE CHURCH

GROWTH GROUP WINTER 2017 – EXPRESSING HOPE WEEK 2 – JANUARY 22, 2017 - MATTHEW 13:1-9, 18-23

GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER

1) Share about a time you bought something that was a counterfeit, or a forgery, or wasn't quite what the packaging said it was going to be? How did you feel?

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Matthew 13 has seven parables that deal with the kingdom of God. Most of Jesus' parables were stories that were told to make a certain point or points. They were a creative way for him to convey the truth that he felt his followers needed to hear. In Matthew 13:1-9, Jesus tells a parable about a sower. In verses 10-17 he has a conversation with the disciples about "why" he speaks in parables, and then in verses 18-23 he explains the meaning of the parable of the sower. In our lesson today we will focus on verses 1-9 and 18-23.

In this parable Jesus says that a sower must sow widely to ensure a successful harvest. Jesus probably speaks of sowing before plowing because he wants his disciples to understand that they cannot always know the condition of a person's heart before they share the gospel. Some people's hearts have perhaps been prepared and others have not. Thus, Jesus says it is better to "sow seed" as widely as possible. Ecclesiastes 11:6 offers similar advice. "Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well."

Jesus describes four different types of soil or people. Some people would listen to what Jesus had to say, but soon forget what they had been taught.

Other people would travel the road with Jesus, but when hardships presented themselves they would fall away. Jesus told his disciples in John 16:33 that they would have trouble in this world, and those troubles and suffering can shake our faith. Following Jesus is not always about how fast we run the race, but whether we finish the race.

Others would get distracted by things of the world. Money, family and other interests have a way of choking out our faith.



Finally, Jesus says, there are some who overcome all of these struggles. There are people who will stay close to him. The fruitful person that Jesus describes, the person whose life bears fruit, is the one who presses in close to Jesus and perseveres. This is what true discipleship looks like. Jesus calls us to have an authentic expression of our faith which is seen in a life that bears fruit and makes a difference in the name of Jesus.

EXPLORING THE TEXT

Read Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

¹ That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear."

¹⁸ "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ²² The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

- 2) A farmer (God) sows seed in a field. The seed is the good news of God's kingdom. The seed is thrown on four different types of soil, with each soil revealing a different way of responding to the message of the kingdom. Yet, in the end, only one soil produces an environment for the seed to bear fruit. Why would a farmer seemingly "waste" so much seed? Wouldn't a wise farmer "know" where to throw and scatter the seed? What does this say to us about the way in which God seeks to share his message of grace and hope?
- 3) The seed responds differently to each type of soil. The seed sown on the path doesn't even take root. In the second and third soil, the seed begins to grow but never bears any fruit. The seeds develop roots, but when difficult times come nothing is ultimately produced. The fourth soil, though, produces a huge crop. The seed (the message of God's kingdom) is always the same, but it is the soil that makes a difference. When you think about your own walk with God, which soil speaks best to where you find yourself today?
- 4) In Matthew 7:16-19 Jesus talks about being known by the fruit that your life produces. ¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

How does this teaching connect with the parable that Jesus tells in Matthew 13?

- 5) Is there a difference between professing faith and possessing faith? Are they connected?
- 6) Can you think of a place in your life where your faith is producing fruit? Is there a place in your life like you feel your faith is making a difference?
- 7) In light of what this parable teaches, can you think of someone you know whose faith is authentic, whose life bears fruit? What are the characteristics of that person?

BRINGING IT HOME

- 8) The parable seems to imply that developing roots in the soil is important for bearing fruit and for an authentic faith. Is there something you could do this week to help your faith feel more rooted in God's teaching and truth?